

# **“A Schizophrenic Perspective”**

## **Blog Posts Part 2**

### **Continuity**

I have written about the disjointed nature of modernity, and the struggles I have as a schizophrenic, from time to time, navigating between different environments.

I find sudden changes to be jarring.

One remedy to this problem might be a sense of continuity. If I could feel that one hour was much like the previous hour, one day, one week, one year similar to the ones before, that would help to prevent me from being jolted by modernity's changes.

That would be an attitudinal change. It would require faith— that things will be ok. It would also require me to ignore this constant sense of transformation— that I am continually going through metamorphoses, and so is the world around me.

How often do I hear about the death of someone I know? A familiar store or business closes? I have to move, or change jobs?

In the past I have made life changes like I was changing a pair of shoes.

When I am with sane, healthy people I notice their sense of calm— and I think that their belief in the consistency of their experiences helps them to feel this way.

Can I learn this? Can I adopt it?

### **Thomas Park: A Short Autobiography**

Greetings! My name is Thomas Jackson Park.

I was born in 1971 on the American Air Base in Okinawa.

A year later my parents and I moved to California, where my sister was born.

I had, to my memory, a blissful early childhood, living with my immediate family in a variety of nice houses in the MidWestern U.S.A..

When I was about 7 years old, my parents divorced. They filed for joint custody. My father remarried.

Shortly afterwards, Dad obtained full custody of my sister and myself, and he, she, and our new step family moved to Maryland, then returning to the Midwest 2 years later.

I struggled during these years, having a tumultuous relationship with my stepfamily. When I was about to enter high school, I asked my father if my sister and I could move in with our Mother.

He agreed.

At the time of high school, I was healthy in most ways, though under it all, perhaps not emotionally. I had developed into an excellent student. As a Junior, I received the highest ACT score in the state of Missouri, and graduated from my class of around 500 students in the third-place position.

My Father, continuing to be supportive, financed my admission and attendance to a premier university, Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois.

I had everything I needed in life, when I left home.

At first, in Evanston, things went well. My grades were good, and I made a great group of friends.

My life took a turn for the worse when I began to squander my scholastic standing and good health, experimenting with drugs.

I imbibed large quantities of marijuana and lsd during college, gradually falling into isolation and private struggle. I managed to graduate in 1993 anyway, with a fair grade point average. But something had gone wrong.

In 1995, I begged my Father to return home. I had lost my job at a cafe, and had taken out a loan, which I was unable to repay. I could not afford to continue to survive in Chicago.

My parents felt that I was not the same somehow, and took me to a psychiatrist. The doctor ran some tests and concluded that I had paranoid schizophrenia.

After a year with my Father and his wife, I ran away, back to Chicago.

I lasted only a short time there, having a hard time keeping work, and trying to live off my meds. At one point, I found myself working at a day-to-day factory job. I would carpool with a group of workers to various industrial plants, performing menial jobs. I was essentially fired from this type of work, as well.

My mother and her husband took me in for a year on their farm. I got back in shape, physically, but continued to struggle emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

I moved in with my sister and her then-time husband around the turn of the millenium. I stayed in their basement, and began writing electronic music on a PC computer.

After about a year I moved into my own apartment. I had a psychiatrist and a case manager. The general idea then for many mentally ill people was to provide them with some degree of independence.

This began a decade long period where I survived, but in greatly reduced fashion. I was able to visit my family periodically, but I had very little money, and spent most of my time on the computer, composing and sharing music.

My interests drove me further from family. I got by on food stamps, consuming frozen burritos and cheap whiskey. I waited anxiously every month for my disability check to arrive. I created literally thousands of pieces of music.

In 2008, my caseworker convinced me to seek employ. I began as a volunteer at a local library.

Two years afterwards, I took on a paid position, as a shelver there.

In 2012, I met a woman at a roller skating party with one of my co-workers. Her name was Torrey.

We began having a romantic relationship, and we were married, in front of about 100 of our family and friends.

I went from being a shelver to a clerk at the library. Torrey and I moved into a small rental house, where we lived with our 2 cats.

As I continued working and living with Torrey, my mental condition slowly improved. I was promoted several times, and became a computer assistant, travelling between various branches of the library. Torrey motivated me to get my driver's license, the first one in decades.

She and I moved into a beautiful house in the Tower Grove South neighborhood of Saint Louis. Our first 2 cats passed away, and we obtained a bonded pair, Tobi and Dylan.

By this time, I was off of nearly all of my benefits. I asked my psychiatrist if I could reduce my medication, and she agreed. I whittled my dosage down to a very small, almost nominal amount.

About 2 weeks ago, I found myself in a barber's chair for the first time in over 20 years. I had been so poor I could not afford to do anything other than shave my head with clippers. I looked into the mirror as the barber worked on my hair.

I was now middle-aged, well dressed and calm. I was married, employed, and well-balanced.

Truly I believe that I was like the prodigal son-- having squandered my inherited attributes, and , years later, with God's grace, moving back to my proverbial ancestral home.

And I do thank God for that.

## **Thomas Park- Benchmark: Hub**

Thomas Park has created art in many different media. Where can we find links to and examples of these other creations?

Though his primary art form is music, he has also created writing, visual art and video art.

Thomas happily has been privileged to create in the era of the internet. Therefore, he has been able to share a good body of this material, mostly for free, via various sites, particularly the invaluable archive.org.

The purpose of "Benchmark:Hub" is to provide an overview of Thomas' contributions in these four disciplines, as well as links for finding related media online.

Thomas would like to thank his friends and family, and especially his wife, who has had to occupy herself in other ways countless times while he assembled his various creations.

Please enjoy these writings, and feel free to follow the links to further explore.

<https://archive.org/details/ThomasParkBenchmarkHub>

## **When Symptoms Get Worse**

It's all well and good for me to again and again suggest that my symptoms have steadily improved, and that my condition is better than it was before.

But, what about the periods of time when symptoms get worse? There are some.

These last 2 weeks have been very difficult for me, in a number of ways. Most of the issues were emotional, or began as emotional issues. Unhappiness, insecurity, fear- for me, they all make the symptoms come back.

Sometimes when I talk to myself, it's to talk down negative or toxic thoughts. I try to explain uncertainty away-- I start by thinking, and end up vocalizing.

When life goes smoothly, there is less of a "need" for the voices-- and they are less of a problem.

I strongly feel that these periods of difficulty are temporary. They come and go. I am in agreement with most people that long-range deterioration should be reported to a medical professional, to see if treatment might help.

As for myself, I feel my situation easing up, and sense that the voices should soon be back where they usually are-- mainly under the surface, largely unnoticeable.

## **Science**

In today's information heavy culture, science is accepted as fact. If a discovery is made, people think that means that absolute truth has been achieved.

In Kuhn's Structures Of Scientific Revolutions, the author demonstrates that science, too, displays elements of subjectivity. He writes about various trends in science that he calls "paradigms". Sometimes, paradigms undergo major shifts (such as when Einstein formulated his theories), and at these times, peoples' views of scientific truth change, as well.

I often think of science as one way of looking at things-- as a particular lens. I think it is especially good at describing phenomena that we already know exist. For example, a new kind of rock is found, and, once found, science describes and catalogs the rock.

Can it predict? Sometimes better than others.

I often wonder, if there were no rainbows, or had never been, would a scientist come forward and say, "We should be seeing gigantic multi-colored curves in the air sometimes after rain showers"?

I don't think science is good at predicting what has not already been perceived. It has other shortcomings, as well.

Why do I bring all of this up? Since the current mode of defining and treating schizophrenia is based on a scientific paradigm (or medical science), there may be some aspects to the illness that we have not perceived or accepted.

There may be mysteries to the disease that we cannot understand until our perspective evolves.

## **Before And After (Or During)**

I was not, to my knowledge, born with schizophrenia.

I was diagnosed with the condition in 1995, when I was 25 years old.

I had problems as a child and teenager, particularly emotional ones. But I was deemed healthy. I lived with my family. I had friends, was active and got good grades.

It would appear that a change happened leading up to and encompassing my diagnosis. I did not seem to be the same person. My parents noticed that I had undergone a transformation.

There were different theories. Was it an issue of addiction? A spiritual crisis? Was it something

a doctor could diagnose, and if so, what would be the treatment? Medicine? If so, would organic remedies be preferred or the more standard types of pills?

I can definitely understand why my parents felt this way, and why they considered putting me in treatment. I really had changed. I went from being a vibrant and connected young man to a person who was troubled, isolated and detached.

It has been hard, then, for me to convince people that I am still the same person. But often I so very much wish I could convince people that under it all and despite it all, I am still "T.J."-- the same kid who loved them, got good grades and told puns at the table, is there and will be as long as I am alive.

As much as I am sure this is the case, I understand that it is difficult to accept, hard to believe.

And I can certainly offer no proof, only make appeals or suggestions.

### **Public. . . Or Private?**

So-- you have a condition-- a disability, an addiction, or something like that?

Do you admit to it? Do you "go public"?

There are disadvantages. A family member reminded me that employers vet candidates nowadays, online and on social media. So, if you are open about your struggles, there are people who might find out who could hold them against you.

When I admitted to my schizophrenia, I was mostly worried about my job. I was worried that my co-workers might treat me differently.

Honestly, there was a period of adjustment. I think that people suspected that something was different about me, anyway.

After a few weeks, they are back to depending on me, and asking me questions about things. Allowing me to contribute without judgement.

This is definitely a testament to my co-workers. They are an amazing group of people.

Dare I suggest that this is also a sign of de-stigmatization? That our culture, our society, is beginning to accept that behind closed doors, people have had struggles, through our whole history? That is ok to admit to these issues, and to work together to deal with them-- or at least, to live and let live?

I do have that hope.

### **Lost Hours**

For some reason, I keep feeling myself pulled back again and again to a certain time in my life. This was the years 2000-2012, when I lived alone in a low rent apartment in the South Side of Saint Louis.

Life asks us to pay attention to our loved ones, to our jobs, and to our obligations. This was a period of time when I had few obligations, and no spouse.

It really was just me, all day, every day, in this shabby place.

Chippewa And Brannon was where my musical act, "mystified", was born.

Part of mystified's development involved the harvesting of field recordings. My collaborator Chris McDill at one point suggested that I stop using purchased sounds in my pieces, and start harvesting my own.

As a result, I was able to capture the atmosphere and vibe of my little apartment in the city.

I tried to convey this atmosphere in many ways. I would use the field recordings as samples, mixing them together. Sometimes there were conscious compositions. Other times, sounds were mixed fractally in a freeware program.

Last night, I dug into my archival drive and posted all of the phonographic recordings I had from that period-- all of them that had not been digitally effected. I released them on archive.org.

Having posted them, I went back to listen. I must admit, these field recordings are indeed the best record of the years 2000-2012 for me. They most accurately capture the vibe of living in poverty in the city. My compositions stretch, mold and exaggerate. The recordings do not.

This was living low and these field recordings capture it exactly.

<https://archive.org/details/ThomasParkSaintLouisUrbanPhonography>

## **"SubDialogue"**

In 2008, I was living in isolation, coping with schizophrenia, in part, by creating music and sound art.

I decided to craft a drone release based on shortwave sounds. I called this release "SubDialogue":

<https://archive.org/details/SubDialoguetafe-24>

Listening back, the tracks make a strong analogy with my illness. They are raw, gritty, visceral. Many of the pieces contain voices that have been altered. The muted vocal sounds mirror the chatter that goes on in the back of my mind.

When I am hearing voices, the impression is as if my mind was acting as a sort of radio, perhaps indeed like a shortwave radio-- capturing voices from the air and channeling them back and forth.

"SubDialogue" was not received well critically. One popular critic derided it soundly, intimating that it was not really music.

To a schizophrenic, "SubDialogue" is music-- it's the very sound that goes on in one's mind, beneath things and through it all.

I am still very proud of this release, and I was happy that Suggestion Records released it in 2008, and that Tape Safe released the remastered tracks later on in 2015.

I did not fully understand this at the time, but as I created sound art, I could not help but to capture, in part, the truth of how things were.

## **Gender**

Given my intimacy problems, the fact that I was single for a number of years, and my status as a musician and artist, the subject of my gender preference came up a lot.

Often, I would be approached for a collaboration, and discover that there were motivations behind the project that were sexual, that were supposed to lead to intimacy, be that hetero- or homo- sexual. Many times homosexuality was implied.

I think that is because the art world offers people with different gender preferences various ways of expression-- it opens of an ability to dialogue. It is known that many artists are not "hetero-normative", and there are additionally certain codes, images, and so forth that are used to indicate preference.

As for myself, I am completely straight. I have hang-ups regarding touch, for sure, and some attributes that may be effeminate. But I am a straight man.

My philosophy on sexuality is that generally it is a person's own personal business. As I mentioned, I have collaborated with people who are gender queer, and I work with them every day. To be honest, issues of sexuality don't come up very often, if at all. When they do, I relegate them to the domain of private preference.

We call sexuality a "preference". To me, that means that we have the power to choose our designations(s). If we were born a certain way, as some suggest, then we also have the power to choose whether to be open about this aspect of our lives or not.

What I am saying is that I am a very "live and let live" kind of person. Though I am heterosexual, I don't feel that I have to live in a world that is completely heterosexual.

I especially am against challenging people about their sexual preference(s). This has happened to me quite a bit over the years, and all I can say is, if I make a choice about my gender, then I've pretty much made my choice. It's mine to make, and should be left unchallenged.

## **Old Friends**

I have mentioned the poverty I endured while living alone for a number of years, suffering from schizophrenia.

Another unfortunate reality was that, on Olanzapine, like many people, I gained a lot of weight. I was up to 280 pounds for awhile, and had only 1 or 2 pairs of pants that would fit.

During this period, I took a trip to Chicago, where I went to college. A number of my friends still lived there.

I have always valued my college friends. They are good people, and represent a connection to better days.

There was an event of some sort, and I was invited to meet with them at a restaurant.

When I showed up, I was wearing my green polyester pants-- practically the only pair that fit. I had a ten dollar bill in my wallet.

My friends were sitting around a long table. They had really come far, already, several years after college. They were wearing silk shirts and designer slacks. They were ordering steak cutlets and similarly expensive fare using their comfortably full debit cards.

I looked down at myself. What had I become? I felt that I was no longer one of these people. I could not even afford to order a side salad at this restaurant.

At this point, I can think of only 2 things to mention.

One is, my friends were still gracious. They told jokes, were fun to be with, and helped to pay for my salad.

The second is, that things eventually did get better for me. I got a career, got married, and moved into a nice home.

It was hard to sit at that table and see how my schizophrenia and resulting poverty set me apart from the rest of the people I knew. But maybe that was, in part, what drove me to try harder to get back into the swing of things.

And. . . people could have been meaner. They were successful, but they were still my friends.

## **Chicago**

A Poem By Thomas Park

The wind hits hard  
Called "The Hawk"  
Memories blown, currents of air

Twin lions protect the museum  
Find your way by the Lake  
Its waters your reference

The world can be seen  
In a few blocks,  
Neighborhoods Chinese, Dutch, African American,  
*Altegeld*

Where I went to school, tried  
To escape family  
Rough trajectory

Years later, roaming the streets  
Miles Davis in my head  
Struggled to assemble change  
To buy noodles, cigarettes

Almost every street I have seen  
Many with friends from the University

Now city of  
Urban cosmopolitans  
Metropolitans  
Black-shod hipsters, businessmen

Quickly walking  
In tunnels of wind  
Hardly looking, never slowing

Yet, I will never completely forget  
The smell of grills in many diners  
Concert halls  
Cafes

The sights and smiles of good friends  
In younger, better days

## **"Knit Cap"**

A poem by Thomas Park

Big Sleep  
Dry light

Through dirty window panes

One long Winter, no  
Central heat

My apartment, South Side Saint Louis,  
Small already

Reduced in essence to one bed, where  
Under the covers I lay

18 hours night  
And day

Covered in Winter coat,  
Knit cap  
To keep the heat in

So cold, Somehow the faucet  
Dripped still

The slow percolation of warmth  
As it approached  
But never turned  
To ice

## **"Saturday AM"**

A Poem By Thomas Park

Early in the morning  
Springtime  
The birds mated  
Chirping loudly outside my window

Traffic sounds faded  
To ambient noise, a dull hum

My pipes sang  
Liquid, guttural  
Chorus of water on porcelain

A celebration, loaf of bread  
Jar of peanut butter  
From the Shop and Save  
(Food stamp benefits today)

Minimum wage, but Saturday  
A whole day without organizing  
Stooping, placing  
My work as a shelver on reprieve

As the light shone in through slits  
It fell on my waking body  
A whole 24 hours to be free  
A richer man there never was

### **Guest Poems By Matthew Freeman**

I consider Matt Freeman to be a friend of mine. Like me, he also suffers from paranoid schizophrenia.

Matt has captured his experiences and impressions in poetry-- a genre which he is quickly mastering and in which is becoming increasingly well-known.

How perfect that, when a prominent poetry journal touted Matt for his art, they also took note of his humility.

Thank you, Matt Freeman, for sending me these 4 original poems to publish. I hope that folks will enjoy them.

### **The Turning Sonnet**

I'd say more things I'm not supposed to say  
and go where I'm not supposed to go  
like having Chief hide from the CIA  
my hospital jottings which in the know

said if you cry enough the birds would come  
or Lesbia was touching me beneath  
the sheets so soft that I was rendered dumb  
and wouldn't date again until my teeth

were pulled and fake but maybe it will not  
suffice to say how crazy it has been  
and what words did and did not do and hot  
lobotomies and Unreached Things and then

so many things go well you have to write  
them down because you can't believe your sight.

### **Reaching the Impossible Thing**

When I walked into triage  
down in Columbia, Missouri  
I was an hysteric  
who didn't know shit  
and had no anchor  
which would tie me to the world.  
It was there I realized  
why as a child I was  
overwhelmed in my love for Superman:  
My father smoked Kent cigarettes  
and broke a lot of furniture. I  
told this to some no-shit Missourians  
and they thought I was crazy  
but Starla loved the interpretation.

I cannot recall on instance  
of Diana making love to me in my sleep.  
My mother always thought I'd be a pastor.  
I never even had to lift a finger  
for her to sit by me as I drifted off.  
Soon I will be chased  
down the streets of Liverpool  
by a thousand crazed women.  
So put me up for the Egotistical Sublime.  
I'll use this empty keg for a paperweight.  
I can only conclude—and this is  
from a position of hysterical identification—  
that my nurse practitioner is reading my notebooks.  
Oh, how she broke me down and restored me.  
But there was little language on the ward in Columbia  
and the kid said, "I see,  
you're acting just like me."

### **Breaking Up**

I have in my hands  
the list  
of the names  
of all of the  
bars I've been thrown  
out of.

I show the list to Diana.

Let's go get a drink, she says.

After the flood  
of divine images  
I was helpless  
against total persecution.  
I lay in bed in the attic  
so very still in the summer  
when I could hear  
the roofer on the roof  
and I knew if I moved  
my abdomen would cramp  
and the world would end.

It's no wonder Diana  
breaks up with me  
from behind a door.  
You don't want to see psychosis, either.  
And it seems like hours, later on,  
when I've been waiting for the bus  
in the terrible cold,  
in the dead  
of winter.

### **I Knew God Loved Me When My Mailbox Was Empty**

I've come so far now  
that a South City gangster  
wearing a cool leather jacket  
apologized for brushing against me  
when Chief and I  
were at the meat market at Joey B.'s  
looking for mercy.

And then I passed the God-State test  
at St Mary's  
where I was getting my CBC  
when the angry phlebotomist  
came in ironically complaining  
that she wasn't famous. I went  
to the cafeteria after that  
and did what my sister said:  
I sat at a table  
and slowly sipped some water  
and reversed the emasculation  
and found all the fragments  
just like King David—and this  
is where everybody got bitter—

and when I got on the elevator  
to come back up  
and not feeling all that well  
my dear Chinese neighbor indicated  
the hole in my scrubby jeans  
and simply said, "Beautiful."  
And when I found the blinking battery light  
on my phone was out  
I knew the resurrection was real.

## **Personal Contact**

I was a white kid growing up in the suburbs, and I admit that my image of what African American people would "be like" came mainly from the media-- movies, television, music videos, and so forth.

Luckily, thanks to my job, I was able to spend some time working at a largely African American library. It was very clear to me that the culture and mood at that place was not what I had expected. The library had a very relaxed, family-like atmosphere. People were very supportive of one other. There was very little to none of the bombastic aggressiveness we county kids were taught to expect.

Where am I headed with this? I would suggest that many of us have certain ideas about how a group of people "will be". I want to be clear that African American people are not in any way disabled-- rather I want to point out that it is easy to generalize about both African Americans and disabled people (and other groups, as well). Rather than making assumptions, it would be more helpful to meet a few patients in person.

It might surprise you.

Having a disability does not mean a person has no abilities, or is completely "off their rocker". Sometimes, it may mean that a person has certain very specific limitations, but is very able in other ways.

I wonder if some people, having met mentally ill people, might be more like Foucault, who said that, in a psychiatric ward, that he preferred the patients to the staff.

## **Redundancy And Humor**

I have mentioned that my wife feels that my creative impulses tend towards the redundant. There are many examples of this.

I was looking through some reviews of my music back in the 2006-2008 era, and noticed that one reviewer at Vital Weekly (an underground review newsletter), became increasingly frustrated with the similarities between my many releases.

I found some humor in this. I created a video, in which I read the reviewer's words, and responded with mini-reviews of his reviews. I included samples of the music on these releases, so that you can hear how consistent they are.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLJEmu7bJ5I&w=560&h=315>

To me, when something works, I do it again and again until I grow tired of it (and this can take awhile). That may very well be a symptom of my schizophrenia-- that I don't crave the continuous variety that many do. I find predictability to be reassuring.

Or, it may just be part of my personality type.

Either way, it really seemed to irritate the reviewer at Vital Weekly (and it continues to annoy my wife).

## **Synthesis**

Do you know what it means to synthesize? The Wikipedia defines it as, "a combination of two or more entities that together form something new."

A more popular interpretation is that synthesis involves a form of technology.

The human mind synthesizes all of the time.

If a person has read the Bible, looks at an apple, and equates that with sin, synthesis has occurred-- two potentially different ideas have become combined into one. After all, an apple, in and of itself, is just a piece of fruit that can be eaten. It would require knowledge of Old Testament wisdom to see the "secret meaning" of an apple.

I have a theory that schizophrenics synthesize things differently than other people. I think that they associate meanings more than others-- that they tend to feel that certain things "suggest" others, where sane people may not.

That would explain why schizophrenics say things that others dismiss as nonsensical-- like that a strange sound on a telephone line means that the C.I.A. is listening in. That's both a false belief, and a synthesis that is attenuated-- that is too sensitive, too paranoid.

It also explains how many schizophrenics are natural artists. Their ability to associate images, words, ideas and other things can help them to portray various meanings using diverse media.

A weakness becomes a strength, and a strength becomes a weakness.

## **Fear Of Art**

When I began getting involved with art, I came across a lot of people for whom art was "just not their thing". Many people, even very intelligent ones, find art of most varieties to be utterly perplexing.

It's like a different language, that only a few people can speak.

Some folks have lives that are hard enough that they are taught that art is a luxury. They can't afford a nice painting, or a sculpture. That being the case, why would they be interested in art?

Others are taught that art is an exclusive game. Maybe artists are mainly homosexual (which, of course, some are). Or they are all from France. Maybe all artists wear funny hats, or are snooty intellectuals.

Where am I heading with this? When a person looks at a work or art, they may feel that sense that they are reeling through the void. "What does it mean?", they may ask, "I have no idea."

That experience is, in fact, important. It gives a person a place to start from. Realizing the mystery of the whole work, they can then start to describe and discuss the details they do perceive.

What color is it? What texture? What is the scale-- large or small? We can start with little, seemingly obvious things, and from there we can begin to formulate a notion of what a work is about.

So. . . please don't be afraid. There's a lot that can be appreciated about art, for those who are willing to accept that lack of certainty and build from there.

## **My Wife**

I have schizophrenia, yes. I am fortunate that a nice woman married me anyway, knowing that this was the case. In fact, I told her very early on in our relationship about my condition, and she accepted me.

My wife is a type who roots for underdogs.

Lately I have noticed that she helps me in ways that are hard to explain, yet are nearly essential.

For example, on my own, I tend to go on and on. One thing leads to another in my mind. Before long, I am getting lost in a maze of thoughts, ranting silently to myself, or, worse, talking to myself.

A lot gets done this way. I am a man who likes to do things, at this point in my life.

When my wife comes home, life returns to sanity. My thoughts slow down. I start to evaluate my impressions more clearly. My limits are re-established-- and, believe it or not, this is very helpful. I need to know where I can't go with things, where they are too extreme or unnatural.

She helps me with this. She does this, I think, just by being herself-- without even having to try.

We do have our ups and downs. I get very angry on occasion, and this is hard on her. I also hear voices, and she has seen my talk to myself-- another thing that is hard for her to deal with.

I am very glad we are still together. I hope we will be for the long haul-- frankly, I am not sure what I would do without her.

### **More Poems By Matthew Freeman**

My friend the poet Matthew Freeman has been generous enough to allow me to publish several more of his excellent poems. Matt writes a lot about his experiences living with paranoid schizophrenia-- but if it's not painfully obvious, his poems are a lot about all of us and the lives we live.

### **Boulevard Status Update**

Holy shit! I just realized  
that all of the signs I'm seeing  
are actually metaphors. This is  
a huge breakthrough! Now place  
doesn't mean anything and I'm free.  
How could I have been so deluded?  
Today when I saw a dead bird at the  
bus stop I knew it meant I  
was going to sing again.

And when Kelly was so curt at coffee  
I knew it wasn't that I wasn't  
Irish enough or she had googled me  
and seen my history of psychosis nor  
was it because the homeless kid tried  
to put on a block. It was because  
my slightest gesture had her tremble  
and shake and become unable to speak  
and my slightest verb left her in some  
liminal place where ecstasy loomed.

So now I'm going along grandly on God's trip.  
When I went in to the record store  
someone murmured, "Your mom doesn't live here."

I'm forfeiting everything that weighs me down.  
I'm no longer imprisoned by the pattern of ceremony.  
And yes, I accidentally let some type of voice in.  
I'm thankful now that it's mild and I'm glad  
they trusted me with a beautiful analyst and  
I'm grateful for all the REAL things that have happened  
whether from the depths or outside. He's arrived.

### **Sad Experience Sonnet**

I've heard some voices in my day. I got  
so paranoid I thought the CIA  
was after me. On an Alaskan boat  
I threw my medicine into the sea.

I ran my Mustang through a flowershop  
and fell drunkenly out the second storey  
window at a party and would not stop  
raving until some friends had to restrain me

and I have been expelled from schools and bars  
and thrown into the hospital where it  
looked like I would never get out. My scars  
proclaim that I have seen some scary shit.

So I don't have a lot of loot. Know what?  
To be this cute you must be destitute.

### **Reality Proximity Sonnet**

I tripped on "You have got to find your voice"  
for twelve long years. I asked whom I could ask  
but everybody looked at me askance.  
I got online but everything was masked.

Time fled and medicine began to work  
and I got dulled down to a passing bum;  
belief would dissipate, I'd lose the spark  
that made things real and metaphor would come

to claim that everything I thought's insane.  
Reality replaced reality.  
What once was beautiful was now profane.  
Who once was god was now a casualty.

(The wind beats at my window and my door—

I'm closer than I've ever been before)

### **An Exciting Case of Schizophrenia**

After I got back from New York expelled  
and humiliated and emasculated  
and still under the Beatnik Influx so  
introverted I could not see  
what was right in front of me as in  
I sat at a bar with a loud bright Amex  
and this wonderful young lady  
kept hinting she'd like a drink so I  
went over and threw up on  
the jukebox and I was looking  
for the cuckoo but landed  
on the lamplight and when Chief and I  
left I had these discordant elements  
of consciousness following me as we  
ended up at the emergency room and Chief  
disappeared and the judge who was  
my buddy's dad had said you've got to  
find your voice and I told the intake lady  
I needed to see a female analyst  
in the presence of a male security guard  
and these young doctors come in  
and I said I've learned about the  
discourses because I had been sitting  
in structuralism class when  
I was bombarded by the teacher with  
this crazy wild innuendo so I got  
up to freak out and leave as Emma and Jane  
grabbed my shoulders and the  
teacher said you're driving this class  
and when I opened my eyes the  
young doctors were smiling at me  
and language had me screwed like  
I could tell gender and sexuation but  
the truth is just that some stoners will  
talk about someone else but stab  
you in the heart because they're really  
talking about you Lord why did it take  
so long and why did I have to have  
literal auditory hallucinations at the  
same time finally figuring out that  
"Finding your voice" is just a metaphor  
and poets don't necessarily all take dictation  
from voices and I went so far down back at the  
dusty home with Dad and Mom dead and

when someone said something mean  
about me not having a job usually  
someone sinister practicing witchcraft  
I would let them go let them go let them go  
and learn to like myself and what the hell  
because then I exploded on difference  
and a wild flood held up  
a mutiny against total desiccation  
and then twenty years go by and my doctor's  
like you have such an interesting example  
of schizophrenia because you have insight  
and you can even remember how it was  
before you were sick  
and I'm like I've sat in so many rooms  
where someone said "cuckoo" and I found  
it could go either way and what the hell  
all of my early miseries built me up and I have  
to touch the stop sign to know it's real  
and I get this deep numb sorrow and  
I'm sad and when I go out will women  
come from all over and scream at me  
and it's fun to go back and forth and after  
fifteen years I can date and be cool  
and I was walking on campus like through  
wretched fire and I had no expression  
on my face and I heard one kid say to  
another kid look how cool that guy is  
and I'm so happy I've got no warrants out  
and everyone's passing and we're so happy  
here at Parkview Place where my  
friends all give me these microwave meals  
and one dude gave me these new clothes  
and I walk to coffee with my  
friends and I let go and I hardly know anything  
and I don't throw anything out the window  
or care who's watching and who's listening  
and I learned that Lesbia was wrong  
when she said  
you can't be crazy if you know you are  
and as for that bird song by Jakob Dylan  
well maybe he heard of me up in New York  
maybe the nurses want to sleep with me  
maybe I'm file at the FBI  
who really cares anyhow because now  
I know Starla and I sit with her  
very carefully and I try to listen to  
exactly what she's saying and watch  
what she does with her eyes and somehow

I still think she knows more than I do.

### **Like it's Always Sunday**

I've told you everything  
I know about  
the secrets and revisions  
of psychosis. It remains to be  
seen how I will be persecuted.  
But I believe that the  
Pharisees on Forsyth,  
jealous that I'm literally descended  
from a bird, will call  
every publisher in Manhattan  
and tell them I tried  
to kill my brother and steal  
his wife.

The last time I was in Bellevue  
I had Chief go to the house  
where my sister lived  
with twelve young ladies  
and put my big crate of notebooks  
in the attic and disguise them.  
I had to think about growing up.  
I had to consider doing some work,  
not just showing up at the psych ward  
rubbing my belly.

Today I noticed a grammatical error  
during the sermon at the church  
up the street. I sat there wondering  
what I might look like off my meds.  
I sat there rubbing the scarred wrist  
of a homeless girl I had met.

### **Unity, Nonetheless**

There have been a lot of posts suggesting that, "Because I have schizophrenia, this is the case", or, "Because I have schizophrenia, that is the case". It has been a theme that the experience of being mentally ill can be different-- more attenuated, at least, in some ways, than that of being sane (as best as I can recall).

That being said, it occurs to me that a more dominant theme is, perhaps surprisingly, the unity of human experience.

I talk about hallucinations, and the increasingly hallucinatory nature of reality, in general, for all people. I mention the reality warp involving having a President who is a reality television star. I mention how hard it is to know what the truth is, no matter who one is, and how easy it is to be conned by images or other media-- how CG can seem to resurrect the dead, how rubbing elbows with healthy people in a work setting can benefit the sick-- and many similar topics.

My experience with having schizophrenia is that, it is definitely an altered condition. It is not normal. Yet, the nature of modern life is often not normative, in a sense we would have meant, say, 20 years ago. These are increasingly trying times, when people's mental health is tested often-- more than they know.

I am asking for us to work on removing the stigma of schizophrenia, because, as every day passes-- you are me, and I am you.

### **Madness And Civilization**

Years ago, a friend recommended I read Foucault's Madness And Civilization. After over a decade, I am revisiting the text. I have just started re-reading it, and already there are so many things to think about.

Foucault's main point, I believe, is that, as society's ideas in general shift, so does its view of insanity. That is, mental health is subject to paradigm theory.

In the Middle Ages, the phenomenon that ostracized people, that mainly marginalized them, was leprosy. Foucault makes a connection with "madness"-- that once leprosy left Europe, it was the mentally ill who assumed the position of the leper.

Madmen represent certain things, Foucault writes in his first chapter. They embody, in a sense, death itself-- or, a sort of death in life. The crazy person is like a grinning skull. The aspects of life that are uncontrolled, absurd, undefinable-- these things are the purview of madmen.

It seems to me, then, that mentally ill people serve a societal function-- at least at this point in history-- to represent that all about life cannot be controlled or rationalized, that culture has its limits, and that conditioning and socialization cannot always conquer nature.

Mentally ill people allow the sane to externalize this force of chaos-- by embodying it, the madman allows the healthy person to say, "I am not that". The sane casts away what is absurd in life-- perhaps similarly suggesting that there are aspects of life that will forever remain inexplicable, and at the same time, that these aspects are associated with a human mind that has become dysfunctional.

If you say, "I am sane, and you are not", you vanquish your own fears and insecurities. I become the bearer of nature's chaotic forces. Without meaning to, I help you to ground yourself-- to remind you that you are healthy, cultured and well-adapted.

## **Madness And Civilization-- Part 2**

In Madness And Civilization, Foucault writes about an early trope concerning madness-- the "Ship Of Fools". Mentally ill people are grouped together and put on a ship-- perhaps this ship travels the rivers of Europe on a pilgrimage to any of various shrines. Perhaps the insane are simply and mainly cast away from land, from the certain shores of the healthy.

As a schizophrenic person, this image interests me. I notice that a ship is referred to- and it is a vessel that only the insane board. I infer that the ship represents a sort of travelling chaos or irrationality-- to get on board is one of life's possibilities, but the sane reject it.

The "Ship Of Fools" is a metaphor for aspects of society and life for which only fools relentlessly quest. The well-grounded person refuses the journey. Culture, reason, and accepted values are the sane person's landed castle.

Why is the madman on a journey? Why can he or she never dock, never come home? In part, this may be because they have become apart from culture-- society has set them off, on this never-ending quest.

From the schizophrenic's perspective, I have to add that, conversely-- perhaps the mentally ill person has cast society off. The mentally ill person boards the ship, by refusing to accept society's standards. A compromise, to externalize the chaos and irrationality of life, has been refused by the mentally ill person. The insane person embodies that chaos. The crazy person and the sane reject one another.

Perhaps what seems the journey of a fool, to the healthy world, seems to the insane person the quest of a hero-- to leave the shores of the known and defined and seek deeper, more hidden meanings.

## **Some Prose By Matthew Freeman**

I asked my poet friend Matt Freeman to please write some prose about his experiences with paranoid schizophrenia. Here is what he sent me. Thank you, Matt!

### **The Concise Version**

At the instant I awoke to find myself a poet I began experiencing the early symptoms of a possession where something sinister entered and would evolve into what doctors call schizophrenia. I had been such a good boy! Even in a rather Romantic and wild home I had been totally sane, hitting homeruns and getting good grades. Then one of my coaches got me into Dylan Thomas and I began a study of Keats and Rimbaud and especially Jim Morrison (because already I was drinking mammoth proportions in order to relax) in a futile attempt to impress a young lady. Suddenly I was frozen and couldn't do anything about it. I ended up at college with a scholarship but I could only leave my room at night to buy cookies and cigarettes; one beautiful day I met my muse and she took me to the dining hall and introduced everybody

but my brain was completely on fire and I could barely function. My only recourse was to drink lots and remain slightly unstable but somewhat sane. I do remember stepping off an elevator and hearing the Legion and thinking I'd had too much to drink and maybe someday I'd call a doctor. Well, I was bitterly expelled and my father never could forgive me and I was nervous again and I rambled around a little bit and tried to bring myself under control but began thinking an old girlfriend was still in love with me and she was somehow slipping me stuff to make me hallucinate and I panicked and it was like everybody kept saying "soon" and my teachers were talking and stealing from me and I ended up in and out of psych wards for several years while my family and family home crumbled and I would follow the clouds and tell paramedics about all the meds I was on and Jakob Dylan had heard about me in New York and was writing songs to me and once I got so high I had to walk around Webster Groves when language started falling apart and I was so beyond sorrow I couldn't name it and there was no longer any authority so I went to my parents basement and wrote one hundred songs and put on one hundred pounds and was really creepy and smelly and I withdrew from everything and was barely able to go out drinking and I was smoking three packs a day and I lay in bed for twenty hours a day and got a little check and felt terrible about it and well-meaning people kept asking me when I was going to get a job and finally my community support worker called me out and it became clear that if I wanted to live I was going to have to stop drinking and take my meds and not fool around. I was going to have to submit and become free! Thanks to Clozaril and Ativan and lots of miracles that I can't explain I googled "Saint Louis Poetry" and started forcing myself to participate in society and met a bunch of new professors who encouraged me and inspired me and met lots of poets and started getting published and was on my way and through symptom after symptom burning clear through me like light I did not quit meds as tempted or drink or otherwise destroy myself and when I see people on my worst day I smile and say what the hell I've had my ego shattered and seen the devil and such beauty and instead of one-time oceanic reality I've seen what happens when the environment—overheard remarks; the damn signs; the fluttering birds and leaves and fingers of bus passengers—completely falls out of the Romance and turns against you. So that the answer is finding the warmth in the middle of you and about you and remembering to breathe and what an orderly at MPC once said was "a whole new kind of clean" which I can't help but feel has something to do with perception.

## Art And Madness

While reading Foucault's Madness And Civilization, I came across an interesting quote. The author was writing about madness and romantic identification, and he cites an unnamed source,

"We owe the invention of the arts to deranged imagination; the *Caprice* of Painters, Poets, and Musicians is only a name moderated in civility to express their *Madness*." (Madness And Civilization, 29).

The context here is Cervantes' "Don Quixote". Foucault is relating how the creation of art, and the role of the artist, at a certain point in culture is identified with mental illness. This romanticizes madness. It portrays coping with a disease as a struggle with an impossible dilemma, or a series of them. By attempting to capture life's beauty, the artist engages in an irrational struggle that is not mentally healthy.

I see shadows of the Quixote role in living with schizophrenia. There is a sense that, no matter how hard one tries, one will never be sane. Plenty of things can be accomplished-- maybe even great art can be made, but some stigma of schizophrenia will remain.

Hence, the image of jousting at windmills.

Just the same, I would not suggest that art itself involves madness, necessarily. By some societal standards the things that artists do might be regarded as inappropriate, or unacceptable. But I believe that it is possible to be a sane, well-adjusted person and to be an artist.

I am sure that Foucault, in this quote, was referring to a particular view from a particular period of cultural history. But, I think that by suggesting that artists are mad and madness is art, somehow the source of the quote belittles both. It is correct to cite a romantic theme, as to associate two different things in this glib a manner connotes a process of romanticization.

Quixote is not only or especially a hero for the mentally ill. He is a hero for all who continue to believe in an ideal, regardless of the odds, or of what rationality or society might dictate.

Perhaps the experience of the mentally ill artists lies more in a continuum with other people-- and perhaps it is not always a thing to be romanticized, or that is romantic to experience.

## **More On Foucault**

In Foucault's chapter on "Confinement", he traces the history of the large hospitals in Europe, which, in the 1600s and beyond, were used to treat various different issues, including homelessness, substance abuse, and mental illness.

Foucault is clearly against such "confinement". He would have been pleased, I suppose, with the current mode of mental health treatment, which is to establish the independence of the patient. Higher functioning schizophrenics and others who suffer are often encouraged to rent apartments for themselves, buy their own groceries, and so forth.

There was an interesting quote in Madness And Civilization: "It is not immaterial that madmen were included in the proscription of idleness. From its origin, they would have their place beside the poor, deserving or not, and the idle, voluntary or not. Like them, they would be subject to the rules of forced labor." (Madness And Civilization, 58)

This quote interests me in two ways. First of all, it suggests a connection between poverty and mental illness. Back in the 1600s, patients occupied the hospital alongside people who had to beg for money.

Poverty in the mentally ill community is a real and current issue. It's not hard to understand why this is the case-- if a person is unable (or unwilling) to work, and has to rely on government stipends, money is bound to be lacking.

The hospitals of the 1600s resolved this issue, in part, by putting the mentally ill to work. They subjected them to "forced labor". This moved to resolve the issue of the patients' idleness-- helping to rehabilitate them physically, mentally and in other ways. It did not help with poverty issues, as laboring schizophrenics and other "madmen" were not reimbursed for their work.

I have mentioned the "[Ticket To Work](#)" program. This program was key to my rehabilitation. Living independently was a positive, both for me, my family, and my community. Sitting idle all day, however, did not provide me with the impetus to transform myself into a contributing member of society.

Ticket To Work allows patients to gradually come off of their disability benefits, while trying to obtain and keep jobs. Because they get to stay on their benefits for a period of time, it is not as challenging as taking them off of the checks completely and forcing them to rely on work as their main and only income source.

The work that patients do in today's society may be difficult and stressful at times, but unlike 400 years ago, patients are financially reimbursed for their labor. By providing them with goals, discipline and direction, the world of work gives mentally ill people a chance to improve their skills and situation(s).

Using labor for rehabilitative means can be easily abused. Forcing anyone to work without compensation is immoral, and akin to slavery. However, work can be a helpful element in a patients' healing, and becomes a quality of life issue. The early hospitals weren't wrong to think that labor might benefit patients-- only wrong not to compensate them for their efforts.

## **The Unknown**

"The Unknown"-- to write it, it seems like something from science fiction- perhaps from the beginning of an episode of Star Trek. The unknown is a place far away-- a distant galaxy, a forgotten forest, or a hidden cave.

In fact, people come into contact with the unknown every day, and with great frequency. Not every square inch of the planet is covered with sidewalks, nor is every synapse of the brain ordered and understood.

There are days when I feel that I am coming into contact with a mystery or mysteries with great regularity-- even in a sequence, or with a rhythm.

Healthy minds understand that life has a mystery to it. They adapt in healthy ways to this truth. The sane person confronts things they do not know-- but they react in rational and healthy ways to these encounters.

As a schizophrenic, it has been a great struggle to calmly deal with a sense of mystery. I want to understand everything. I don't want to be surprised. I really don't want to take chances in life, of any kind. I don't like admitting that there are limits to what I can comprehend.

I have had to learn not to react with panic when faced with the unknown. Having employment has helped me to do this, by forcing me to deal with people with whom I am not familiar. My wife, too, helps, as she often stretches my boundaries. She prevents my from lapsing into everyday predictability.

It's a quiet and heroic thing about people, I think, that they have to cope with a sense of mystery, and that they must do so frequently. It's a challenge to the mentally ill to remain coherent and calm when having similar experiences-- to move with confidence towards the unknown, and to react appropriately to it.

## **Thomas Park's Dream Symbols**

Thomas Park details the genesis and development of his "Dream Symbols" paintings and prints in this mini-documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7lKeiOfMek>

### **Thomas Park's Dream Symbols**

I wanted, for my whole life, to be a painter. Several years ago, my wife encouraged me to purchase the tools to start following my dream.

Immediately I was faced with a difficulty-- what to do with a blank canvas?

I attempted several strategies. I made stripes-- paintings that had long swaths of pigment, sometimes in alternating colors. These lost their appeal pretty quickly.

I created paintings using various "print" techniques-- applying acrylic paint using bubble wrap, sponges, and other textured surfaces. This seemed more interesting, but ultimately my paintings ended up feeling disorganized and kitschy.

One day, I was in my bedroom studio. I laid down a fairly solid background. I decided to paint a mysterious symbol in front of the background, using black paint. Something clicked-- it looked great. I applied more symbols to the canvas.

Over the next few years, I created a substantial number of what I called "Dream Symbols" paintings. I used spray paint behind or sometimes on top of the mysterious black symbols. Occasionally I applied watered down white paint as a final layer, mimicking the white "X"s used to cover over graffiti in urban areas.

I considered the Dream Symbols paintings to represent my struggle with the unknown. They came to signify this experience of observing various societal taboos, or other potential codes or meanings, and being unable to or refusing to completely interpret them.

I scanned and photographed many of these paintings, and used a freeware graphics program to layer them, so that the panels bled into one another visually. I applied additional effects to these digital prints, simplifying the colors and adjusting brightness and contrast.

I realized that, because of the paranoid schizophrenia that I struggle with, I had a history of turning away from the subjects of popular thought. In my solitary retreat, topics of modern discourse became dream-like, or hallucinatory. They occurred to me as possibilities which I often rejected.

Modern life, to me, could be summarized using something like a series of hieroglyphics-- a language from a different culture, a different era.

Through treatment, work and general efforts, I have tried to recover from my illness. The Dream Symbols remain to me visual portals into uneasy, unfocused uncertainty. They continue to resolve the dilemma of a blank canvas, or to fill vacant time-- without supplying discrete cultural, political or similar references.

### **Why Would You Trust Me, Anyway?**

There is something called the "liar's paradox". If I tell you that I am lying, it must certainly be true. Because if I am honest about lying, then I am lying, indeed. If I am dishonest about lying, then I have committed another lie. Either way, I lie.

Similarly paradoxical is the notion, "I am a schizophrenic who can be trusted". Because I am schizophrenic, and I am the one writing these posts, they are from my own perspective, which, granted, is that of a mentally ill man.

Since mentally ill people have warped points of view, since, for many, they are hard to trust, you might feel that you can't trust what I have to write.

This problem of the unreliable narrator has been explored in modern fiction. Most contemporary fiction posits that the main character, from whose point of view we experience the story, is imperfect, and that, in order to understand the work, we must understand his or her weaknesses.

Maybe, I am just playing games with logic, or with smoke and mirrors. The smoke disappears, and there is nothing left.

Or, maybe, the answer lies elsewhere.

I realized, when I spoke last with my friend Matt, who has schizophrenia, that I used to not trust him entirely. And that, at some point, that lack of trust had faded away.

I now trust Matt very much, as much as I trust anyone.

Maybe it's the case that mentally ill people can be trusted- that they can establish a legitimate point of view, in spite of conventional wisdom.

I would challenge you to believe what I write, and to have faith in Matt's poetry and prose. I would urge you to listen to the many, many millions of people who have mental health issues,

and to open your mind to the notion that they may be productive people, as well-- at the very least, they are born, do suffer, and will die, and therefore they have perspectives worth hearing, and believing.

## **Sanity**

Who are the "sane", from the perspective of a schizophrenic person?

Sane people are worldly-wise. They have been around the block a bit. They have a healthy cynicism about new or unusual ideas, and know the workings of the world.

When you look into the eyes of a sane person, there is belief-- and also a great deal of doubt.

Because sane people tend to dismiss the strange or irrational, or, perhaps, they "rationalize" it, their thinking takes on a logical, solid, almost material quality.

When sane people have a point of view, they are difficult to sway. They may believe in the same thing, essentially, their entire lives-- or at least for long periods of time.

As a mentally ill person, I have always been jealous of how calmly and completely sane people can understand this world's basic working principles. I have also often been sad about the illogical or irrational things that a sane person has to chuck out the window.

Sane people can be dreamers, but only in very conditional ways, from my view.

## **Eugenics**

Many speculative works of fiction discuss it-- some societies have attempted to enact it. It's using scientific means to alter the course of human development. Eugenics might involve changing the genetic code directly, or breeding certain qualities in or out by terminating or preventing some births, while encouraging others.

Obviously there are moral questions raised by any eugenic process. Trying to control the course of mankind's development seems to challenge divinity-- or, at the very least, to throw a wrench into fate.

I just watched a video of a man with Down's Syndrome. He pointed out that it would be possible, technically, to identify pregnancies in which the child had the syndrome, and then possibly to terminate such pregnancies.

A point was raised that surprised and impressed me. The man suggested that he has a happy life. He listed many sources of pleasure and achievement. Through his speech, he smiled frequently. It would be hard to imagine that such a person might not have a reason or right to live.

I would like to borrow this man's point. Mental illness can involve suffering, yes-- both for those afflicted and for their families and friends. Schizophrenia can be very challenging to live with.

Yet, schizophrenics have value. People who suffer from mental illness can live full lives. They can work, marry, create-- perhaps even have children of their own.

They can be artists, librarians, even leaders.

In short, to take a cue from this man who has Down's Syndrome, I hope no one will assume that a life with mental illness is a life devoid of value or meaning.

I know I value my own life and find happiness more frequently and with more depth than I ever would have imagined.

## **An Increasingly Common Sickness**

My wife and I were watching a movie in which apes had become fully sentient, and could communicate with one another much like humans. The creatures were repeatedly tortured and murdered in the film. I grew increasingly uncomfortable watching it, wondering if I was supposed to feel extreme pity and guilt throughout, or to write the apes off as not being worth my feelings.

It's a problem I have more and more. I walk into a room-- a movie or show is on the screen. I see something profoundly disturbing. I have a hard time figuring out how to react. If I laugh off sexual or violent imagery as being part of life, and not to be taken seriously, then I fail to empathize. Inappropriate reactions are, incidentally, a symptom of schizophrenia.

If I take what I see too seriously, I literally torture myself. And no one seems to be doing that.

A friend pointed out that he had a profound reaction to watching a video where a person really and actually shot and killed another. This is something new to the world-- with social media and cellphones, many of us have watched people killed (much as, for example, people in the military or on the police force have).

I suspect a lot of things. One of my suspicions has been that we as a society are being trained to separate what we see from what we feel. We are slowly being taught not to empathize with others when they suffer.

I can't imagine why this would be, unless it is a tool to help us to cope with living in a first world country, with all of the Empire, military action and other such activities that go on.

A profound and universal pity would cause us to feel continuously, deeply guilty. We would be rendered ineffective-- unable to cope with day to day reality.

## **Problematic Assertions**

I have touched on the issue of the "imperfect narrator". Most views of the modern person suggest that people, in modernity, have self-awareness. Probably people have been self-aware throughout history, but due to the nature of modernity, with overpopulation, increased communication capabilities, and other phenomena, we are now more conscious of ourselves, and we know that we have limitations.

Mentally ill people, especially, often develop a practical sense of humility, due to issues specific to them and how they are regarded.

A modern man who viewed himself as King Louis XIV would be laughed at, and probably sent to treatment. We are just people-- we do what we can. We make mistakes. God may move us, He may animate us, but we are-- well, "common".

This is all well and good, but the issue arises that, at times, an assertion must be made. There is an issue, perhaps-- a person sees an answer, or a better way. They want to share that answer.

Because they are fallible, because they are steeped in a pool with so many others, their voices are drowned. Nothing changes. They are not King Louis, to change their nation by edict (even if they imagined they were). They are, for what it's worth, just citizens.

I remember when a number of protests were erupting in Saint Louis, concerning the death of a young man by the gun of a police officer. I supported the protests, in a way, at first. After several weeks, I started to think that the people involved should probably leave the streets and meet at a discussion table with the police and other politicians.

When I recommended this (and, of course, it was in the troubled forum of social media), I was met with some agreement, and a lot of negative energy. Suffice it to say, that just because I thought of a possible answer-- it had no tangible result.

That seems pretty obvious, in retrospect. It does, however, raise the question-- for a modern person, and particularly one with schizophrenia, whose views have been doubted in the past-- if some productive or pro-active point were to be made-- how would this be done? We see ourselves in this reduced sense, perhaps even as figures of camp. Who are we to address the world's problems?

If we found a solution-- who would listen?

## **More From Matthew Freeman**

Prose can be clear, blog entries cogent and concise. Sometimes, nothing communicates as well as poetry, and Matt Freeman does that very, very well.

Here are some more poems he has sent me, so that I am able to feature them here.

## **Dignity**

I keep seeing this rich  
therapist in Chesterfield  
because I feel sorry for him.

We both pretend  
that my Medicaid is  
paying for it when we  
both know it's not.

He says, "Oh Matt, tell me  
about the time you thought  
St Louis was Athens. Tell me  
why you buried your license  
in Forest Park. Let me in  
on the revisions and secrets!"

I have to point out to him  
that when a girl  
at the bar raises her finger  
sometimes it means  
get away  
and sometimes it means  
that she hates her boyfriend.

After I told him what  
was really going on in  
the emergency room he  
seemed to get a little  
high. But then I brought  
him down with the  
inevitability of genuine angst.

Whenever he hears a slight  
motion behind us at the  
door I tell him it's only  
a blind dude passing by.  
I'm always asserting  
that a deflowering cannot  
take place in a vacuum.

And all of this is because of SSI and  
the time and repeat and dignity it  
gave me.

## **Appointment**

Whenever I have to go down  
Euclid to Barnes-Jewish  
I get off the 97  
at Kingshighway right by  
the sorrowful KFC instead  
of having to walk by Left Bank  
and suffer all the humiliation  
that comes with it and have  
to remember what I said in  
the ruins of Duff's when  
I was in some prior state  
like I was the Lizard King again  
before everything got sinister and ugly  
and even Now counts as a holy relic  
and is the result  
of a change of a disconcerted  
consciousness and even now  
I had to be the Other and belong  
because of the quadruple metaphor  
of the guy outside Coffee Cartel  
saying "You have to pump it up"  
and as I elegantly go forth  
to be mistaken for a gnosis I know  
they do not know this process down at Barnes.

## **The Fury**

It's getting harder and harder  
to read.

I am all done with experience,  
the possibility  
in a raised finger,  
the indication  
of a rising and falling chest.

I saw the Greatest Mental Patient  
of All Time and  
time laid waste sitting  
on the steps  
of the Masonic Temple  
with his busted feather and white lie  
wearing a paisley tie  
he got from the Salvation Army,

all he did was sit and smoke  
until suddenly an Idea lit him up

and he got up and started walking  
away, saying goodbye, only  
the outer part of a beautiful dream,  
sinless, still smoldering  
just a little bit.

### **Quiet and Loud**

I think I drank  
too much coffee  
again.

(they took Lesbia's  
picture off  
the internet)

It's disgusting in the waiting room.  
Everyone's having sex but they don't  
even know it. If they came  
into that knowledge  
they would cease  
to exist.

And being a doctor's just  
totally sublimation  
for being crazy.

I spot a pretty Catholic girl  
in sneakers and beautifully  
clean and rich workout clothes.  
I walk up to her and whisper,  
"Do you really feel like I do?"

### **A New Kind of Clean**

Oh, I don't think nobody's  
ever felt this way before.

I had finally reached The Impossible Thing—  
in the shape of a beautiful heiress  
wearing fur and walking her dog  
down on Washington while Chief was  
weeping at the bar and this release was  
everything was so easy—so they  
put me on three antipsychotics at once  
and sent me home with a PRN of Haldol

and then the window wouldn't open and the TV beloved TV wouldn't turn on and the CD player was broke and I tried to put a little wine and bread on the windowsill and the air was dull and the phone did become a little less paranoid but unfortunately I was unable to talk at all and people were like are you gonna get a job and I sat there stiff and tears wouldn't come and this big environment which was once mine for the taking had turned on me simply pulled out and now I was too introverted to see.

## **Contentment**

Are there any advantages to mental illness?

For me, one might be a lack of contentment.

"LACK of contentment?", you might ask?

I believe my schizophrenia is a main factor in helping me to be a producer, rather than a consumer.

I enjoy, not just writing for this blog, but also composing music, recording phonography, painting abstract paintings, creating prints, writing poetry and essays and other forms of art.

I am so accustomed to creating (and enjoying) my own media, that I have fallen out of touch with popular culture. When I join my wife in the living room, I tend not to like or have patience for what I see on the television. I also feel uncomfortable consuming other people's art, rather than creating my own.

From my perspective, it seems perfectly reasonable to create over 5000 audio works in 15 years. Others might immediately suggest that that is an absurd amount of music, connoting mental illness.

Can't I just make my point and quit? What keeps me going?

It's a sense of feeling incomplete, of wanting to create more, or, at least, to express more-- to do it better, to fill in the gaps. There is so much that goes unexpressed in this world. In my free time, I try to remedy this.

I can't help but to imagine that a sane person might be patient enough to pense silently.

Not a crazy man like myself.

## **A State Of Readiness**

As a person with schizophrenia who has tried to re-assimilate, I have had some interesting experiences. One involves a state of readiness.

Life tends to throw a person things they don't expect. Sometimes, sure, a person might not even feel like they deserve them-- for better or worse.

To seek health, I had to cultivate a sense of readiness. I had to train myself to be prepared for things that I could not predict or control.

For someone like me, that can be hard. I am a very habit-forming person. Ask my wife.

That being said, being prepared is really redemptive.

The two most helpful forces in my life-- my job and my wife, are helpful to a large degree in that they break my patterns up. They throw me curves. Thanks to them, I have learned that I am able to react to sudden problems and new issues without panicking.

When schizophrenics isolate, they often settle into a kind of predictable medicated haze. This is accentuated by television, the internet, cigarettes, cheap booze, and so forth.

The way to get better is to get out and experience life. And, let's face it-- that won't always be easy. A person has to learn to roll with the unknown.

In short, you have to do the opposite of what many health care professionals might recommend, protective as they can be. You have to leave your nest and fly a bit.

## **Solitude Versus Isolation**

When I was a child, I was deemed healthy. I lived at home with my parents and sister, got good grades, and lived what most would regard as a normal middle-class existence.

In high school, I believe I showed symptoms of depression. There was a period of time when I grew apart from my family and friends-- this may have eventually led, at least in part, to my becoming schizophrenic.

In fact, I was always a fan of solitude.

But, where does one draw the line between solitude and isolation? What is the difference between being a child who liked to be alone, to daydream or read books, and a man in his thirties spending all day every day alone in an apartment writing music?

Degree, I suppose, is the difference.

That being said, I wanted to share a poem I wrote about my love of solitude:

**Norman**

A Poem By Thomas Park

Life goes by quickly  
And there is much to do

Duties need attending to, and that is  
Norman's purpose

At work, they knew his birthday,  
Threw a party (Had soda, cake)

All was well, though

A sense of mystery  
Surrounded Norman

A shadow, perhaps a haze

No history, no libido  
(Or that was muffled)

No sense of style

Khaki slacks, unironed  
Pressed by the dryer

Brandless polo shirts  
Of muted hues

Or perhaps it was

That Norman himself  
Found certain things inconvenient

There's too much truth in old stories  
Fraternity hijinks  
"Borrowing" Dad's Car

Worse, Norman's pivotal moment  
Involved neither a parade nor award ceremony

It was the late 1970's  
Norman was curled in a ball,  
In his pajamas

Near the heating duct  
The family dachshund was by his side  
The muffled sound of television  
And parental voices  
Were largely ignored, it was  
A moment of blissful meditation

It was the best 5 minutes of Norman's life

## **Memory Loss**

The mind certainly has its mysteries.

I think my mind had fewer of them before I started experimenting with drugs. In fact, some might suggest that my collegiate substance abuse contributed to or led to my schizophrenia. (Though that is a hotly contested topic. Many folks don't want to admit that pot and/or acid can be harmful).

Back when I smoked pot every day, I developed a problem. I lost much of my short-term memory.

People might suggest that that is not big deal, and that the euphoria and other pleasing effects of smoking dope make the drug worth it.

But, believe me. . .

As soon as I did something I knew I had to remember, I would silently scream it to myself, repeatedly, for example-- "MY KEYS ARE IN MY COAT! MY KEYS ARE IN MY COAT!"

I wrote a lot of stuff down. I had to-- I thought it would all be wiped clean from my pot-riddled brain. Luckily, I usually could read my own notes-- though even I occasionally found my handwriting to be inscrutable.

Luckily, marijuana-induced short-term memory-loss does not seem to be permanent, at least for me.

I quit using drugs, got cleaned up, and worked on improving my powers of focus and concentration.

Nowadays, I am as often the one who remembers, as the one who forgets.

I have found my wife's keys for her a number of times. Whenever it happens, it's like a ray of light appears from above-- "Oh my God! I remembered! I can remember things!"

Hallelujah, Amen.

## **Like A Strange Beacon**

I have been involved with creating art in various forms for about 2 decades.

For the most part, I write music. I also paint, create prints, write poetry, essays, record field recordings, and other things.

In the past few months something interesting was revealed to me.

My main music act, "Mystified", was a long-term project. It lasted about 17 years. Throughout this time period, I created dark, abstract soundscapes. My main genre was drone music, though I also made ambient, dark ambient, experimental electronica, industrial, and other varieties.

During that whole time, I never mentioned (at least, in any direct fashion), that I have schizophrenia. I did notice that many independent and/or underground projects made references to mental health issues-- and I may have, too, in some oblique fashion now and then-- but, I just assumed this was considered the norm for people who were into dark or counter-cultural musics.

When I admitted publicly to my condition, a few months ago, a good number of my fellow artists and friends admitted that they, too, had either schizophrenia or something similar. Many of these people were my most loyal followers. They were the ones that were most supportive, especially on social media.

It's a mystery, but somehow, a good number of the schizophrenic artists ended up in the same social circle. The internet was our firepit, and our illness seemed to be like a strange beacon that summoned us all to one place.

I wonder why that is? Maybe this blog is partly about me trying to figure that out.

## **A Big Sleep**

Having schizophrenia was, for a time, a bit like being asleep while being awake.

I felt that there were essential parts of myself that remained dormant. I had a lot of untapped potential. Some people may not have believed this, that I was full of latent capabilities-- to believe that might have been to force or coerce me to use them. Others believed this all along, and, unfortunately, I was unprepared for some time to take stock in what they suggested.

There is a lot of precedence for the idea of being asleep while remaining alive. "Rip Van Winkle" was said to have taken a 100 year nap-- coming into awareness a full century later, in a new time and under new circumstances.

Tolkien's "King Theoden", one of the human rulers of mythic Middle Earth, lay prone under a dark spell of sleep for a long period of time, until fate and necessity made it necessary for him to awaken.

Cinderella, too, to mention a female character, fell into a drowsy paralysis, having been duped into consuming a poison. Only the embrace of the right man could pull her from her sleep. (Traditional, for sure-- but similar in essence to the other examples).

These, obviously, are fictional cases, and are not literally true. They may be, then, all the more appropriate, concerning what I am suggesting is part of the schizophrenic experience-- a state of mind (or states of mind) where feelings are muted or submerged, where the affect is flattened. The libido is muted, or ignored. The mind falls asleep, lacking thought or consideration (perhaps to be visited on sporadic occasion with racing or paranoid thoughts).

Life can be hard, and it often requires a good deal of effort and concentration to make it work. A person can't win a battle or meet their significant other while half-asleep.

The tragedy of schizophrenia, then, contains it's hope, as well- the patient has passed from consciousness, from a healthy awareness, into a sort of sleep-- but-- may it be that they might awaken, at some point, and return, at least to some degree, to health?

## **A Crazy Idea About The Sun**

Since I am schizophrenic, I have lots of weird ideas. Here is one that occurred to me while cleaning house, that gave me hope:

The answer to a lot of our problems, and to general scarcity, might well involve harvesting the heat and power of the sun. Our sun provides large amounts of various forms of energy continuously.

Essentially, if we convert the thermal power of the sun to potential energy, which is so very simple to do, we have created a limitless flow of relatively free power.

We can do this.

What are the obstacles? Mainly, changing the energy grid over is problematic.

Perhaps if we started on a state level, offering incentives state by state to institute at least, say, 95% solar energy within a certain time frame. That might create a sense of friendly competition.

How do we finance this changeover? It's pretty huge. Why not create a new form of currency? It could be like a bond, in which the actual value of the currency could exist in future energy yields. Something like a Watt-buck.

If people can create currencies like bit-coin, they can create currencies that invest in and (very quickly) profit from renewable energy.

How to convince the skeptics? Show them the projections, give them something to invest in.

Changing to solar power could make a huge positive impact on this planet, and that is something we sorely need.

## **A Different Perspective From Matthew Freeman**

I am very appreciative of poet Matthew Freeman's generous offerings to this blog. They are really gifts, as he informed me that, technically, when they are published here, they are-- well-- published. How lucky we are to have these works at this blog to read and consider.

I challenged Matt to write from the perspective of a sane person, and/or to describe a state of sanity. We hear so much about how mental illness might be perceived from the view(s) of the sane. How do mentally healthy people appear to the schizophrenic poet? Let's find out.

### **Christmas Dream**

For a long time now  
I've been thinking  
about how I used to come  
home from New York

in the dead of winter  
to the warm old house  
in Dogtown with my  
pocketful of bar napkins

with rhymes and how my mom  
would be making potato soup  
and Chief was asleep on  
the porch and the living room

was so dark and safe lit only  
with the Christmas lights  
and how I felt  
such boozy love there

and what changed  
and what had to change  
for me to see  
clear through disaster

and how I could have  
been a completely sane poet

at Christmas with not one  
line coming against my will

and how closed I would  
have been with my bruises  
and lungs and cheap stale beer  
to that sinister, sinister dream.

### **Sane Vignette**

Before I knew  
it a bunch of birds  
broke through my window  
and I awoke  
and got ready for school

and on the way in my bright Mustang  
I passed a guy  
who was talking to himself in rags  
and I laughed and  
spilled coffee on my shirt  
and turned up the radio  
and checked myself in the mirror  
and I liked what I saw

and then for many years my eyes  
took on the color of dead still water  
with a plugged-in alarm clock in it  
and I couldn't move I had to force  
myself to move and I found myself  
walking a brick ledge and a bell went  
off in dispossession and they said take  
this little pill and on the third day Diana  
showed up and everything was totally clear  
and I'm like now I know Beethoven and  
the difference between depression  
and persecution anxiety and sometimes  
I have walked the streets disheveled and at  
any other time in history I'd be dead and when  
last I put my head on Diana's door I said  
I'm destroyed but in a good way with double vision.

### **"If You Wanna Be a Poet"**

Once I was dead drunk  
and sane and not at all crazy

and I cried  
when I was lonely and  
my mom comforted me and I met  
a girl from Singapore  
and we held hands at the movie  
and drank some forties

and sane is not jumping  
over the nurses' desk  
and throwing a computer  
because no one believes  
you're married to Nicole Kidman  
or crawling  
all over the floor in the day room  
thinking you're pregnant  
and you realize  
you're either a ghost or God  
and when you get out  
you sleep for twenty hours a day  
and you make a chapbook of poems  
and you give  
it to your community support worker  
when he comes over to do your meds  
because you accidentally  
took a month's worth of meds in two weeks  
and he keeps  
putting the pill bottles on top of your book  
until they are conflated in your mind  
and this is the beginning of sanity.

## **A New Language**

Do you ever notice that thoughts tend to take their course in the same way? Maybe when you talk about certain subjects, you get stuck in a familiar pattern, a familiar rut?

I have a crazy, schizophrenic idea.

I find that there are a lot of important discussions going on today. For example, many people are concerned with political or social issues, such as racial or gender equality, the wage gap, and similar concerns.

The problem I face is that, as soon as I think about issues like these, I find myself thrown in one direction or another-- in fact, I generally end up cursing to myself, or feeling upset.

The words we use concerning certain issues can be quite loaded. For example, I bet you can think of occasions when terms like, for example, "shine" or "yellow"-- which should be, in essence, harmless, might not be appreciated.

I feel that a lot of the trouble comes from how we put things, and that one word or term seems to suggest another. People can be very attenuated about words that are used-- sometimes so much so that meanings beneath are lost.

We need some Stanford linguistics grad student to come up with some new ways of putting things, that are neutral and have no connotations, so we can talk about charged issues again without offending one another.

## **A Wain Cat**

Artist Louis Wain is well-known, in part, for painting a series of cat images, as he gradually lost his sanity. I would like to spend a few moments looking at two of them.



The first and earlier image still bears a good resemblance to what we think of as a cat. It has a cartoon-ish quality, though, and it is unusual to see what appear to be emanations from the animal-- these lines of energetic colors.

To me, the energy lines are partly aesthetic, but mainly I would suggest that they connote an unusual idea or set of ideas about the cat. There is a wild, frightening quality about the cat (according to Wain), and he is trying to capture this.

The colors, too-- they are quite unique. An unusual combination of tones. I could only describe their effect as creating uneasiness. These are not the gentle, harmonic color tones of a Monet, that is for certain.



The second image shows a movement into the more abstract, and even psychedelic. More than anything I can think of, it resembles a 1970's album cover.

The image barely connotes a cat. It has devolved into a series of patterns, and these display a stomach-churning symmetry. The cat is no longer a familiar pet-- it is an amalgamation of barely organic forces. It is more as though we are seeing the family cat without its skin-- forced to look at its organs.

Perhaps it is clearest to say that the second cat has become abstracted to a degree that is unnatural.

That may be the point to be observed-- that schizophrenia may not involve a lack of abstraction, but rather the existence of a particular kind of unwholesome, redundant, disquieting abstraction.

I can't help but to think of the harsh, high-pitched fractal ambient pieces I composed when I first became schizophrenic-- and the effect they had on my family, when they heard them.

I can't offer a remedy for this kind of abstraction. Maybe if Wain had spent more time petting the cat than depicting it, he might have reached a more comfortable state of mind.